Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Farm and Food Report is produced weekly by Zapwell Communications Group for Communications Branch, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
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Log Number: 06-45-206
Week of November 6, 2006

"4-H MONTH" HONOURS ORGANIZATION'S CONTRIBUTIONS

November has been designated as "4-H Month" in Saskatchewan to acknowledge and honour the contributions of an organization that has helped generation after generation of youths become outstanding citizens.

"We're really proud of the young people who develop life and leadership skills through their involvement with this program, and we want to share that pride," said Stan Figley, Saskatchewan 4-H Council President.

The designation of 4-H Month has come at the national level, as well as the provincial level here in Saskatchewan, where 4-H has played an important role in youth development for almost 90 years.

The organization's roots in Saskatchewan go back to 1917, with gardening and grain clubs in Colgate, Tantallon and Dubuc. It has evolved since then to include a wide variety of interests, from livestock, light horse and pets to hobbies and life skills such as woodworking, photography, crafts and cooking.

Today, there are more than 230 clubs across the province, with approximately 3,700 4-H members and 1,100 adult volunteers.

In order to recognize 4-H Month, local clubs will engage in a variety of activities, including setting up community and school displays, visiting nursing homes, hosting colouring contests, conducting school presentations and much more.

"We see it as an opportunity for 4-H clubs and the 4-H organization to celebrate 4-H and promote it among their communities – promoting the benefits of 4-H and increasing awareness for the organization," said Kim Minogue, the Regional 4-H Specialist for northeastern Saskatchewan.

Minogue herself grew up in the 4-H system, then decided to get more involved at the provincial council level. "I was a member for six years in the light horse project with the 4-H club in Kyle," she said.

Her experiences in the organization have been nothing but positive. "Young people who join a 4-H club can look forward to learning more about a project topic of their choice, developing lifelong friendships, having fun and gaining valuable life skills," she said.

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"The goal of 4-H is definitely to strengthen the skills of our youth enrolled in the organization and to develop their leadership skills," Minogue added. "We try to achieve that through our motto, which is 'Learn to do by doing.' Definitely we stress the development of leadership skills."

No matter what the interests of its members are, the 4-H program's main goal is fostering positive personal development in youth. Club members complete one or more of 27 project possibilities, manage their own club affairs, including holding all of the executive positions, and take part in a wide range of 4-H activities, from camps to inter-provincial travel exchanges.

To become a 4-H member, a youth must be between six and 21 years of age. Those interested in learning more about the organization or how to join can call the provincial 4-H office at (306) 933-7727, or visit the Saskatchewan 4-H website at www.4-h.sk.ca to find contact information for clubs and regional specialists in their area.

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For more information, contact:

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"GRAZING SCHOOL" BRINGS IN FORAGE AND PASTURE EXPERTS

The "2006 Manitoba Grazing School" conference taking place just over the border offers a great opportunity for Saskatchewan cattle producers to network with their colleagues in the livestock industry and hear from some of the foremost experts in the field of forage and pasture management.

The formal part of the program will take place November 28-30 at the Keystone Centre in Brandon, Manitoba. It is sponsored by the Manitoba Forage Council, Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (MAFRI), and participating agri-businesses.

Pam Iwanchysko, a forage specialist with MAFRI, is the chair of the program committee for the conference. She says that the organizers have been overwhelmed by the ongoing popularity of the Grazing School seminar.

"We started this concept in 1997, so we've been going nine years strong now. We had a small conference, it was just a bunch of forage specialists who got together and thought that we should have a provincial conference that focuses on grazing and pasture management, because there was a definite need for it in the province. We've had a lot of conferences specifically focused on livestock production, but nothing on forage production," Iwanchysko said.

"When we first started it, we thought it would last a couple of years, then the popularity would start to die off and we'd quit. Well, it hasn't died off yet, and we still get phenomenal response from producers. We always get positive comments in regards to our evaluations, and it's just grown and grown and grown."

Iwanchysko points out that the Grazing School generally draws around 400 people every year, from across the prairies and even from the northern United States. "I'd say around 20 per cent of our attendance is from Saskatchewan, which is terrific," she noted.

Iwanchysko feels that much of the conference's popularity is due to two main factors. First, the seminar offers delegates a lot for a very reasonable registration fee. There are notable keynote speakers, expert presentations on leading-edge research, break-out sessions for producers to network and learn from one another's experiences, a trade-show with numerous agri-businesses, a very popular banquet and other social functions.

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Second, conference organizers always strive to select topics that are relevant to what's going on in the industry that particular year, so delegates are always hearing something new in areas that are emerging and becoming increasingly important to their operations. As a result, many producers return to the seminar year after year, which is a positive indication of its value.

"Our keynote speaker this year is Dr. Anibal Pordomingo, who is coming all the way from Argentina to speak about producing forage-finished beef," said Iwanchysko. The practice used to be popular in Canada decades ago, but producers shifted over time to mostly grain-finishing cattle. Now, new research has begun to reveal that there may be health and medical benefits to forage-finished beef, which is generating renewed interest in the approach.

"The Manitoba Forage Council has just finished going over an analysis of producing forage-finished beef in Manitoba. So we're kind of promoting that it can be done here on the prairies. It's not something that is out of reach for us," Iwanchysko said.

Among the numerous other topics featured on the program are fertility management in forages and pastures, getting the most out of native pasturcland, seeding cropland into forages, and integrating livestock into a zero-till cropping program.

Registration for the Manitoba Grazing School is $150. Producers, agri-business entrepreneurs, academics or anyone else interested in learning more about the conference can visit the Manitoba Forage Council website at www.mbforagecouncil.mb.ca or call the agency at (204) 482-6315.

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PATIENCE PAYS OFF FOR CHRISTMAS TREE GROWERS

When you are a child, the wait for Christmas seems endless, but the payoff of that moment when you spot the beautifully wrapped gifts under tree makes the wait worth it.

For Saskatchewan Christmas tree growers, that payoff will come this year.

Bob Mason, the President of the Saskatchewan Christmas Tree Growers Association, says it has been a good couple of years for growers.

"The Christmas tree crop looks excellent this year," he stated. "We've had two good growing seasons in a row. Survival was good for the young ones, and the growth on the older ones that we are shearing and sculpting into Christmas trees was excellent these past two years."

Mason says good moisture levels were the key, and that translates into a better product.

"Last winter was not hard on the trees, but mostly just having good moisture conditions made the difference," he explained. "If the trees get lots of moisture, they will do well. What happens with more moisture is thicker growth, so that you get a thicker looking tree when it is sheared. Also, if there is enough moisture, they retain their needles better, which also makes for a better looking tree."

That doesn't just mean a better tree on the lot – it means a better tree in your house.

"If a tree goes into the fall moist, like it is, they keep their needles better in that time from when they are cut and when they are put in the house," Mason noted.

Mason says trees are planted every year so there is a harvest every year, but there is long wait between planting and that magic moment on Christmas day.

"It takes eight to 14 years to grow a Christmas tree, depending on the species. A pine tree with the long needles could be ready in seven years, but fir trees, even though they are native to Saskatchewan, grow slowly and can take up to 14 years to get a good tree," he stated.

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With that kind of time and input cost commitment, Mason says having two good years in a row is boost for the industry as a whole.

"The industry is small. We are just kind of getting our feet on the ground. Having two good years helps the industry…because [growers] can see more success early on," said Mason.

There are 25 members of the Christmas Tree Growers Association, including five Alberta members. Currently, Saskatchewan is producing approximately 12,000 trees per year.

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GRAIN MILLERS HARVEST SHOWDOWN FILLS UP YORKTON

The weekend of November 9-11 will really test Yorkton's capacity. The 18th annual Harvest Showdown – sponsored this year by Grain Millers Canada – is on at the same time that the city will be hosting the World Junior "A" Hockey Challenge.

Don Kunkel with the Yorkton Exhibition Association says they're up for the challenge. "It's quite a unique thing to have these events on at the same time," he said. "We had to give up our rodeo, but the weekend we'll have should more than make up for that."

Although hockey players will take the place of ropers and riders in the arena, the other agricultural events taking place elsewhere on the exhibition grounds are front and centre at this year's Harvest Showdown. Events include the Futurity Heifer and Pen of Bulls Shows; the auctioneer competition; stock dog competitions; and the largest grain and forage show in western Canada.

"The grain and forage show is one of the biggest parts of our event, and I think that's a large part of why Grain Millers came on as our title sponsor," said Kunkel. "It takes up the whole lobby of the Gallagher Centre, which if you've been here to see after our renovations, is quite a lot of area."

If livestock is what you need to see, Kunkel says the sheep show is very strong this year, and the commercial cattle show is getting bigger, as well. There are also expanded education forums throughout the event, including presentations by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool and animal health professionals.

Another favourite, returning portion of the Harvest Showdown is the trade show, household arts competition and rodeo fashion show.

Admission to the Grain Millers Harvest Showdown is free, which gives you access to the livestock and grain shows, the competitions and the trade show. Entertainment events running each night from Wednesday, November 8 to Saturday, November 11 will charge a ticket fee. Tyler Lewis, Saskatchewan's own *Canadian Idol* favourite, will perform on Thursday, November 9.

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Kunkel says in a normal year, about 12,000 to 15,000 people come through the doors at the Harvest Showdown, but with the hockey on as well, they are anticipating up to 20,000 people to go through the site over the three days.

As a result, Kunkel noted that accommodations in Yorkton are also going quickly. "Book early, that's all I can say!"

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For more information, contact:

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ORGANIC CONNECTIONS FOR THE WHOLE FOOD CHAIN

If you're thinking about going organic, are already there, or just want to learn about the organic food industry, the Organic Connections 2006 conference and trade show in Saskatoon is the place to be.

Conference President Debbie Miller says they expect about 500 conference delegates to attend again, based on numbers from the 2004 conference.

"Our goal is to try and connect all of the different people within the organic sector – to connect consumers to some of the producers, producers to some of the retailers, to some of the processors to some of the grocery traders. Our goal is to bring them all together," Miller said.

The conference is held every second year in Saskatoon, rotating in order to give other prairie provinces the chance to host similar gatherings in the other years. The conference attracts a majority of participants from across western Canada, but Miller notes they have registrations from every province in the country, as well as one from Nepal.

Miller says they organized this year's conference around three central themes—production, marketing and healthy living—with concurrent sessions for each happening throughout all three days.

The production sessions should hold something for everyone. "We try to strike a balance between basic information for producers who are just thinking about organic farming, who want to know about things like weed control and green manure, and we also have some more advanced and diverse production sessions," Miller stated.

The marketing stream of the conference is devoted to helping producers find value and new or alternative markets for organic products. "For example, we've got a chef coming in to talk about marketing products to restaurants," said Miller. "It's about learning to shorten the link between farms and end users."

Part of the emphasis on healthy living will include a presentation from Amy Jo Ehman, a journalist and writer from within the province who dedicated a year of her life to exclusively eating the foods of Saskatchewan.

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Other speakers leading the plenary sessions feature a diverse set of backgrounds, with topics ranging from sustainability research to niche marketing and value-added food processing.

Planned social activities include a murder mystery night in partnership with Saskatoon's Off Broadway, and an Organic Celebration night at the Western Development Museum, complete with organic food, beer and wine.

"This idea of celebration runs throughout," said Miller. "Celebrating organic food and the people who produce it – celebrating the farmers. Fun is a really big part of this conference."

Organic Connections takes place November 12-14 at TCU Place in Saskatoon. Registration for the full three-day conference, trade show and program is $371 per person, with various options for partial attendance also available. Registration forms can be downloaded at www.organicconnections.ca. Trade show booths are sold out.

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